



MARCH 1983

Affirmation:

United Methodists for Gay and Lesbian Concerns

LIFE AMONG THE BABYLONIANS g/l theology weekend, nashville, 2/25/83

Of all the questions that we raised at the theological workshop held last month in Nashville, I keep returning to the one first asked in Psalm 137, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

At first I didn't like this question one bit. It came, I thought, from despair, anguish, and exile. And "exile" seemed surely to be an image bad for lesbian and gay people, an image focusing on our pain and brokenness rather than on our pride and strength. I wanted to hear the story of an exodus, I wanted to see a promised land, and what I heard were lamentations. I had gone to Nashville looking for a Moses, and they were talking of Jeremiah. I wanted Charlton Heston; they gave me Mr. Rogers. I wanted Martin Luther King, Jr.; they gave me Uncle Tom.

So then the psalmist's question was asked, I began to pull out my spiritual soapbox, ready to step up and battle with those defeatists wallowing in images of exile among the Babylonians. But then I realized I had nothing to say. Nothing. I stopped. I began to listen to my sisters and brothers around the table. And I heard the story of how the Babylonians took the Jews into exile and how the Jews kept their identity and developed their faith while living among their oppressors.

I knew, of course, that we live in a land of heterosexuals, macho bullies, and homophobic Christians and that the land is indeed a strange one. But, then, I saw this strange land differently: I saw us as a people, intertwined with our heterosexual enemies and friends, yet separate and distinct from all of them. I saw us living our ordinary lives in ordinary ways yet living as a people among the Babylonians in a strange land. I saw us as lesbian and gay people of faith and wondered what is our covenant with God.

Over the coming months -- as some of the participants transcribe our discussions and draft our ideas into a working document -- you will hear much more about that weekend in Nashville. For the moment, though, I'd like to share with you my understanding that our theology of liberation should begin with reclaiming our identity as a particular people of God.

Much of our energy will always be spent in answering the questions of the Babylonians, in responding to the concerns and fears present in a homophobic church and society: Are homosexuals sick or just handicapped? Is a homosexual lifestyle compatible with Christianity? Why don't homosexuals just shut up and live their own lives quietly?

(Cont. on p. 6)

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BY:

L. A. Meeting April 8-10

"Preparing for a Trip:

Pack up your bag, and smile, smile, smile!"

Tentative Schedule

Friday night

6:00 Gathering (please try to arrive by this time)

8:00 Worship service with L.A. Community

Saturday

9:00 Coming together, sharing

1:30 Task groups meet

3:00 Free time

7:00 Task group reports

Sunday

9:00 Business meeting

10:00 Closing

More on page 2. . .

COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Michael Collins

New York, NY

Mary Gaddis

Holy City, CA

Morris Floyd

Minneapolis, MN

Ava Scott

Philadelphia, PA

Lyle Loder

Los Angeles, CA

Leanne Tigert

Waltham, MA

Travel Pool & Other Info. . .

In Minneapolis the fund raising task force was asked to design a functional travel pool, something talked about endlessly but never taken seriously. A report was submitted to Boston but the recommendations were not accepted. More work was requested.

The earlier design was completely overhauled and submitted to the coordinating committee during its January meeting in Wash., D.C. It was agreed that the new design be tested out with the L.A. meeting.

How does it work? Very simply. If you attend the L.A. meeting, you are expected to participate in the travel pool.

The registration blank requests your estimated travel costs. All the costs will be totaled and divided equally among the full number of participants--regardless of the distance travelled: L.A. folks will pay just as much as folks from Nashville and Minneapolis.

Without a doubt, this will increase the costs of attending for some, especially the L.A. people. But we feel it is important and significant in two ways: First, it will enable more participation by women

and thrid world people who tend not to have incomes comparable to that of white males. Second, it is a sign to the Church that we take our solidarity seriously--that we care about inclusiveness and equality.

There are some creative ways to deal with travel costs. L. A. participants and supporters will share total costs of L.A. participants by "passing the hat" until the amount is collected. One can also look for sponsors who will share a participant's cost since the sponsors are not attending. (If there is anyone out there who would like to sponsor a participant, let us know!)

It should also be stated that anyone who simply does not have the money to attend should let us know beforehand. We will try to locate funding to enable attendance. We must know, however, before the meeting.

Persons attending should arrange flight

Persons attending should arrange flights into Burbank or LAX. If LAX, plan to use the airport bus or limo. service to Roosevelt Hotel in Hollywood. For more information, call Lyle, [REDACTED].

Registration form

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

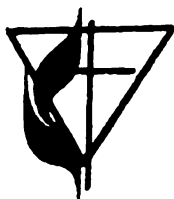
Phone _____ I will be arriving: _____ Time _____

Estimated travel costs _____
(for travel pool)

Travel plans
(Flight, etc)

RETURN THIS FORM WITH \$20 REGISTRATION FEE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO: Affirmation

For questions, call [REDACTED].



Affirmation:

United Methodists for Gay and Lesbian Concerns

March, 1983

Post Office Box 1021

Evanston, Illinois 60204

Dear Friend,

As we in Affirmation continue our efforts to enable the United Methodist Church to be more inclusive in its ministries, it's important that we support the endeavor with our presence, prayers and financial commitments.

Significant gains have been made during the last year -- Affirmation became more intentional about its work by implementing a new structure, assigning to regional task forces responsibilities for nurturing, national church, communications, education and fund raising; we began working with general boards and agencies to fulfill Discipline mandates; an openly gay man was elected by the Southwest Texas Conference to its Board of Church and Society; the Judicial Council determined that nothing in existing church law bars ordination of lesbians and gay men; and lesbian and gay participation in the ordained ministry became the major issue of national debate due to the faith stance of Bishop Melvin Wheatley.

It's critical that we not lose momentum, especially as we prepare for the 1984 General Conference in Baltimore. It is crucial that we all participate now in the work of Affirmation so that we might all succeed together in the future months.

We're requesting you to do four things with Affirmation:

- 1) attend one of the national meetings--Los Angeles in April, 1983; Baltimore in September, 1983 and April, 1984
- 2) remember our efforts in your prayers
- 3) make a financial contribution now by writing a check and mailing it today (every donation is helpful, be it \$5.00 or \$50.00)
- 4) pledge to support our efforts and maintain that financial commitment (return the form below with your first contribution!)

Thanks for your support and participation in Affirmation.

Sincerely,

Mary Morris

Mary Gaddis and Morris Floyd, Spokespersons

P.S. Make your checks payable

to Affirmation and your contributions are tax deductible

I WANT TO SUPPORT AFFIRMATION BY PLEDGING \$5.00 _____ \$10.00 _____ \$25.00 _____ \$50.00 _____

other \$ _____

to be paid monthly _____ quarterly _____

NAME _____ STREET _____ CITY _____
STATE _____ ZIP _____

(tear off and mail to AFFIRMATION, [redacted], Evanston, Ill. [redacted])

Is the UMC for Gay and Lesbian Rights?

Since 1972, the United Methodist Church has been on record as seeking to ensure the human and civil rights of lesbians and gay men. On the basis of our Social Principles, United Methodist leaders in a variety of locations have publicly supported legislative efforts to assure those rights. Lesbian and gay leaders in Wisconsin, for example, have credited the support of religious figures such as United Methodist Bishop Marjorie Matthews as making the critical difference in enabling passage of that state's bill.

Ironically, the denomination itself has been among the offenders in denying to gays and lesbians in its employ the very rights which it seeks to ensure in the society at large. Nor have United Methodists been consistent in their support of our rights.

Paragraph 72 of the Discipline speaks of the Social Community and makes explicit statements of support for the rights of many groups, including racial minorities, women, the handicapped, and others. Lesbians and gays are absent from that listing. As a remedy, the following is suggested:

(Proposed addition to the Social Principles Statement on the Social Community, United Methodist Discipline, Para. 72)

MFSA SUPPORTS L/G CONCERNS

The Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) has adopted "support of ministry for and with gay and lesbian persons" as one of its four priorities for the 1984 General Conference. Other priorities adopted at a January executive committee meeting included support for social justice ministries, Central America, and militarism.

MFSA last summer celebrated its 75th anniversary as a progressive force in the denomination. Its history includes having been among those organizations singled out for special attention during the anticommunist witch hunts of a generation ago. Chapters of MFSA are organized in many annual conferences, with a national office in Staten Island, New York. The Rev. George McClain is executive director.

Affirmation and MFSA are coordinating legislative efforts related to the 1984 General Conference; many local Affirmation groups have found cooperation with annual conference MFSA chapters to be a mutually supportive experience.

Para. 72 B)(re-letter succeeding sections)
Rights of Lesbians and Gay Men.---Homophobia (the irrational fear of homosexuality) has been the basis of socially encouraged and widely practiced discrimination against gay men and lesbians. It has created a climate in which violence against and harassment of these persons is tolerated, rationalized and even justified by some. To avoid loss of employment, damage to family relationships and physical danger, many homosexual persons have felt it necessary to hide their identity, at great cost to the fulfillment of their full human potential. Their invisibility as a minority has meant that social institutions and agencies, including the church most often cannot understand or respond adequately to the needs of gay and lesbian people and their families. We hold that persons should not be discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation, and we call for the creation and effective enforcement of legal sanctions against such discrimination. Further, we urge that religious and social service agencies make affirmative efforts to develop programs sensitive to and respectful of the needs of individuals and families where a same-sex affectional orientation is present.

DATES FOR NATIONAL MEETINGS

April 8-10, 1983	LOS ANGELES
September 16-18, 1983	BALTIMORE
April 27-29, 1984 (tent.)	BALTIMORE

The Affirmation Newsletter is published four times a year by the Nashville task force. Cost is \$15 for third-class mailing and \$20 for first-class mailing in a sealed envelop. Send subscriptions to:

██████████
Evanston, Illinois ██████████

CLERGYWOMEN'S CONSULTATION

(This year's National Clergy-Women's Conf. in New Mexico had the theme of inclusiveness and featured multi-ethnic unity and diversity in its format. The following statement was prepared and read by Affirmation folks there in response to the conspicuously absent inclusion of gays and lesbians in the unity and diversity.)

STATEMENT TO THE UNITED METHODIST CLERGY-WOMEN'S CONSULTATION Feb. 10, 1983

We stand here today to be a voice for those who have been silenced by the church. Some hold a vision of justice in loving hearts but are unable to make it plain because of fear. While this consultation has spoken of inclusiveness and of affirming unity in our diversity, the lesbians among us have been invisible and almost totally ignored by this gathering. There has been an emphasis here on dialogue and personal sharing in which many of our sisters have been unable to participate fully because to do so would jeopardize their ministries and make them even more vulnerable to experiencing the rejection they already have suffered. Most people are unaware of the deep pain that this engenders.

But this is more than a personal issue-

BHEM LEGISLATION ANALYZED

Affirmation has learned that the Division of Ordained Ministry of the general Board of Higher Education and Ministry will propose to add "fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness" to the qualification for ordination to the United Methodist ministry. Reports differ about exactly where that phrase is proposed to be added to the Discipline. The most likely spot seems to be Para. 431.6, which is also quoted in the lengthy footnote to Para. 404.

One reason given for opposing this change is that it returns the church to the "laundry-list" approach to evaluating the character of candidates for ordination. The 1968 General Conference specifically abandoned the practice of listing specific behaviors which clergy should not do. This was not seen as lowering standards but as calling clergy to a personal discipline of health and wholeness.

The change also contributes to a generalized anti-sexual atmosphere in the church, in direct contrast to the more affirmative posture reflected in the first two paragraphs of the Social Principles

it is a question of Justice as well. The issue of gay and lesbian rights is one of the most pressing issues facing the church today, and yet this consultation has functioned as though it did not exist. We call upon this clergywomen's consultation to make plain the vision which can only be plain when it includes all the people of God. As a first step, we invite you to join us in standing as a witness that this invisibility must end. By so doing we also break the conspiracy of silence which has gone on far too long. If you share our conviction that lesbian and gay people should no longer be treated as second-class citizens in the church - that they are full members of the people of God who are called by God to the ministry of Christ our liberator, will you please stand and join us in singing Holly Near's "We are a gentle, angry people".

Let us pray for the church:

- for sensitivity to the pain of others
 - for the healing of divisions
 - for the wholeness of the community of faith
 - for wisdom and the discernment of the will of God
 - and for the courage to follow that call of God
- Amen.

statement on human sexuality (Discipline, Para. 71)

A final concern about the proposed language is the way in which provisions such as this customarily are enforced discriminatorily against lesbians and gay men. For example, many states have laws prohibiting all forms of sexual contact except intercourse between husband and wife in the "missionary position." With few exceptions, prosecutions under these laws are directed exclusively at gay men and (less frequently) lesbians.

Without for the moment debating the wisdom of limiting sexual expression between heterosexuals to the marriage bonds, it is clear that this proposal can (and we have to assume will) be used to further the marginalization and exclusion of openly lesbian and gay clergy. With this stance, we are put into a classical double bind: the church will not recognize the relationships of those gays and lesbians who wish to formalize them and it holds that any sexual expression other than with in marriage is inappropriate.

(Cont. on p. 6)

(Cont. from p. 1)

In some ways, of course their questions are our questions, at least at certain times during our lives. Like other oppressed peoples, we have all too easily internalized the assumptions and the fears of our oppressors. For as long as standard teachings remain, it will be important for us to reinterpret the handful of Biblical references to homosexuality. As long as traditional power remains intact, it will be necessary for us to struggle against church and civil legislation aimed at our oppression.

Yet a completely revised interpretation of the story of Sodom is not a basis for faith. Nor is modification of legislation a large enough task for our witness. We need an understanding of the entire Scriptures, not just a few minor parts. We need witness worthy of our faith. We need a theology that starts with our identity as a people of God and goes on to ask our questions.

(Cont. from p. 5)

Regrettable as it is, this position is consistent with the view held by many that homosexuality per se is not objectionable, but homosexual practice is "incompatible with Christian teaching." As the dialogue on this question continues, we should recall that there is a theological component to the issue. Simply put, the theological question is raised by asking whether we do or do not believe in the doctrine of creation. If God's created order is good, and if that order contains a process by which some persons express the gift of sexuality with persons of the opposite sex and others have a same-sex orientation, then both orientations may be seen as God-given and good. To call upon a person of either orientation on the basis of that orientation to abstain from sexual practice would constitute a denial of the goodness of God's created order.

This argument will certainly not convince those biblical literalists who insist that same-sex sexual practices reflect a rebellious and therefore sinful rejection of one's "natural" self. While honoring the depth of faith experienced by many holding to that view, however, we are beyond the point of being held hostage to it. Though no responsible psychologist or sexologist claims to know precisely how sexual orientation is formed, there is clear consensus that it is not chosen. If sexual orientation is not chosen, then the biblical proscriptions are no more applicable to contemporary sexual practice

Even when we have the opportunities to give our answers to their questions, we should not forget that the questions come from our oppressors. Necessary as it may be, dialogue with the Babylonians is hardly sufficient. We need to ask our own questions: What is our covenant with God? What are our gifts and graces that enable us to be in ministry? Who are our clergy? What does it mean to love our enemies and to do good to them who persecute us? Does our faith have anything useful to say about genital sexuality? How do we function within patriarchy? What images do we have of ourselves and of our future?

As it unfolds, our theology is one means by which we may know what is necessary for our lives and for our salvation as a lesbian and gay people. Our theology may help us know what the Lord's song is for us. And, then, we may have an answer to the psalmist's question. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? Loudly!

than are the dietary laws to current eating habits.

Affirming "celibacy in singleness and fidelity in marriage" seems innocent enough on the face of it. As this analysis shows, the issue needs close examination. It's a good subject for discussion with potential delegates to General Conference.

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